

INTERNATIONAL LONGSHORE AND WAREHOUSE UNION
PACIFIC COAST PENSIONERS ASSOCIATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
LABOR ARCHIVES OF WASHINGTON
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HERMAN MORENO OF ILWU LOCAL 13, LOCAL 63

INTERVIEWEE: HERMAN MORENO

INTERVIEWERS: HARVEY SCHWARTZ

SUBJECTS: FISHMEAL; MISOGYNY; NICKNAMES; DISPATCHING; 1971 STRIKE

LOCATION: 2013 PCPA CONVENTION, PORTLAND, OREGON

DATE: SEPTEMBER 16-18, 2013

INTERVIEW LENGTH: 00:24:18

FILE NAME: MorenoHerman_PCPA_2013_Video_acc6194-001.mp4

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[00:00:00] **HARVEY SCHWARTZ:** My name is Harvey Schwartz. I'll be doing the interview today. This interview is part of the Pacific Coast Pensioners Association Oral History Project. This may be the first interview that we're doing. Can you give me your name and date of birth and what local you're from?

[00:00:27] **HERMAN MORENO:** My name is Herman Moreno. I was born on June 8, 1934 in San Pedro [California] . I am now seventy-nine years old. I worked on the waterfront from 1955 and retired December of 1999.

[00:00:52] **HARVEY:** Can you tell us just a little bit about your background growing up?

[00:01:00] **HERMAN:** Ok.

[00:01:00] **HARVEY:** What kind of work did you do? What kind of education you had?

[00:01:04] **HERMAN:** I went through from kindergarten to high school. I went one semester to community college, Harbor [Los Angeles Harbor College] . Then I went into the service for two years. I was a naval reserve. Then I came out and worked at [?Douglas?] for six months. I was able to become a sporty, which is now called a casual. I worked there from August of '55 to April of '56, when I got my ID card. Then I was fortunate enough to get my Class A book in 1957, March 7th. The reason why: because they elevated eight foremen. They already picked a list; I hadn't made it. But then, with the elevation of eight more bosses, I happened to become a Class A longshoreman.

[00:02:05] **HARVEY:** That's great. Can we roll back a little bit? Tell me about the term "sporty" and what it was like being a sporty.

[00:02:11] **HERMAN:** Sport hall was just like a casual hall where the extra work went to the sport hall. I picked up the jobs and took them out to the sport hall. From Wilmington [California] , I went to Carson [California] . They had a baseball field called Pat's Field. The baseball team that used to come and train there was the Seattle Rainiers. That's where the jobs were dispatched out there. That's where I started and, like I said, was fortunate enough to come in seven months later to get my ID.

[00:02:48] **HARVEY:** That hall was separate from the Local 13 hall?

[00:02:50] **HERMAN:** Yes, the hall was separate. They had a runner, which they selected me to be the runner, to pick up the jobs out of "the meatlocker" where they gave extra work out. At that time, they gave jobs out to teachers during summertime that were not working and [to] other unions.

[00:03:09] **HARVEY:** How come you got to be a runner? Why did they select you?

[00:03:13] **HERMAN:** I can't remember why I got selected. Maybe an honest face? I'm not sure! [laughing]

[00:03:18] **HARVEY:** Were your parents involved in the ILWU?

[00:03:21] **HERMAN:** My dad became a longshoreman in 1949. He worked for the San Pedro Fish and Game [California Department of Fish and Game in San Pedro] up until the war years. Then he worked at the Bethlehem Shipyard [relating to Bethlehem Steele] , a DOD [Department of Defense] shipyard. After that, he got in.

[00:03:42] **HARVEY:** Was he active in the union, over the years?

[00:03:47] **HERMAN:** No, he just worked. He wasn't involved in any type of activity—being on committees and so forth.

[00:03:56] **HARVEY:** Can you tell me about your first day on the job? Do you remember your first day as a longshoreman?

[00:04:01] **HERMAN:** I remember it very well. I went to Outer Harbor 55, which at that time was a wooden dock that had holes in it. The name of the ship was the [?Bremerstein?] . That was my first job.

[00:04:15] **HARVEY:** Tell me about the day, how it went. Was it fun? Was it easy? Was it hard? Did people give you a hard time?

[00:04:20] **HERMAN:** No, nobody gave me a hard time. They welcomed me very well. The work was hand-stowed cargo. It was a discharge. It was no problem at all. It was enjoyable. But I'll never forget that day.

[00:04:36] **HARVEY:** What was the cargo?

[00:04:38] **HERMAN:** It was plunder, which is various different kinds of cargo and carton boxes and so forth. It was a German ship that came in from Germany.

[00:04:49] **HARVEY:** It was plunder, you say.

[00:04:50] **HERMAN:** Yes, plunder. It was boxes. Could be boxes of clothes. It could be various things. Tools. Various types of things.

[00:05:06] **HARVEY:** How come I've never heard that term before? Plunder.

[00:05:10] **HERMAN:** I guess that's a term we used down there on the waterfront at our port. You know, different places have different things. I was very fortunate in my career to go up to San Francisco [California], first time to work up there. I traveled to 'Frisco [San Francisco], Stockton [California], Coos Bay [Oregon]. From Coos Bay, I went to Portland [Oregon]. I worked in Seattle; I worked in Bellingham [Washington]. I worked in Port Blaine [Washington], the last port in the U.S. before you go to Canada. At that time, they had plunder up there. Salmon was in cases of boxes. Cans of salmon.

[00:05:53] **HARVEY:** What was your favorite cargo that you worked?

[00:05:59] **HERMAN:** Favorite cargo? I'd have to say working citrus. Oranges and lemons. Those were nice, clean jobs. Easy jobs. You also got to get a few of the oranges to eat. That's what I enjoyed. The good stuff went overseas, the better stuff.

[00:06:23] **HARVEY:** How about your most difficult or most disliked cargo?

[00:06:30] **HERMAN:** Fishmeal. It had a smell to it, ugh, a raunchy smell. You get home, and you can't wait to get in the shower and wash those clothes because it had that fishy smell.

[00:06:43] **HARVEY:** Do you have any funny stories behind either of these products? Any comical things, or things you remember?

[00:06:53] **HERMAN:** The first time when I got fishmeal, I just put some all on my clothes. I hugged my cargo when I worked on it. There was a fellow named "Mr. Clean," Al Villanueva. He'd come in in nice clothes, just like I'm wearing right now, clean shoes. He'd walk out the same way. He kept his cargo away from him. He got that nickname, and I wish I could have done what he did. Unfortunately, I didn't.

[00:07:28] **HARVEY:** Did you have a nickname?

[00:07:30] **HERMAN:** No. At one time they called me "Roadrunner" because I used to like to run. I ran distance races and so forth. But I didn't really have a nickname that stuck by. Which leads me to the case of a classmate of mine. It came out in the paper, nicknames down in San Pedro, because we nicknamed a lot of

people. I ended up getting 300 names of guys on the waterfront that have nicknames. I asked different guys, "Take a look. See if this list has nicknames."

[00:08:05] **HARVEY:** You plan to give that list to some place where it will be preserved?

[00:08:08] **HERMAN:** Yes, I plan to do that, for sure.

[00:08:11] **HARVEY:** Like a library, or...?

[00:08:12] **HERMAN:** Right. They have a log in San Pedro of old things. Once I can get more names on it and can go farther, I will do that.

[00:08:27] **HARVEY:** Were you involved in union activity? Did you run for office?

[00:08:33] **HERMAN:** Yes, I did. I ran for executive board. I was on the board quite a few times. In 1967, it was the first time I ran for night dispatcher. From there, I worked four different times as a night dispatcher. I ran one time for secretary-treasurer and lost, and I'm glad I lost.

[00:09:04] **HARVEY:** Why do you say that?

[00:09:07] **HERMAN:** It would be hard for me to protect guys coming in with complaints for various things. I'm just glad I didn't make it. I liked dispatching. I worked nights. I was the night dispatcher. I'm the only one there, I know what I had to do. Did it, and enjoyed it.

[00:09:33] **HARVEY:** How come you decided to run for office in the first place?

[00:09:38] **HERMAN:** I've always liked to work with numbers, and it was working with numbers.

Yesterday, out of the clear blue sky I remembered [?Bill Collins?] , who retired in Astoria [Oregon] and worked down in Local 13. I remember his work number out of the clear blue sky.

[00:10:03] **HARVEY:** That's amazing.

[00:10:05] **HERMAN:** I know guys more by numbers than by names. I forget names.

[00:10:10] **HARVEY:** They're hard to remember. Is there any particular incident you remember, maybe a strike, maybe some sort of situation that you recall? An accident? Something that is very memorable that you saw on the waterfront?

[00:10:22] **HERMAN:** I will always remember the '71 Strike. I went in to help out. I volunteered four days a week. Then, the weekends, I worked at a meat place to get a little more income for the family.

At that time, I put the bulletin together. I would type the bulletin out. I had people go out and get articles. Then I'd put them out on the mimeograph machine and print them out. Try to get a weekly or biweekly bulletin.

One thing I remember very well was we had a guy, [?Louie Lamont?] from Local 13. Local 63 had a guy, and so did the foremen local, the Clerks 63. They went out to solicit donations for the strike fund. They went to Ante's Restaurant, a well-known Slovenian [Croatian] restaurant in San Pedro. They went to Ante, and he didn't donate. He said, "You guys make enough money," and didn't donate

What happens at the end of the strike? The guys go back to the place. I didn't go back to Ante's for 10 years.

The other one? There was a shoe guy up by Peck Park. He let the guys write IOUs and pay him at the end. A lot of guys stuck it to him and didn't pay.

The third guy, there was a Greek hamburger stand by the [?Cold Bull?] , which is no longer in Wilmington. He donated food to us. He gave us discounts, and the guys went to another place for hamburgers at the end of the strike.

So those three things will always stand out in my mind. What kind of guys we had that didn't help these people out who helped us out in dire need time.

[00:12:33] **HARVEY:** Did you ever try to do anything about that?

[00:12:36] **HERMAN:** I tried to tell the guys. I should have put it in the bulletin but did not. That was my mistake.

[00:12:45] **HARVEY:** It's ok. Sounds like you gave it a try. The 2002 Lockout, do you have any memory of that? Were you involved in that at all?

[00:12:54] **HERMAN:** I was retired then. We did help them out by helping them out with whatever we could. I can't remember what I really did at that time.

[00:13:27] **HARVEY:** Did you mention when you decided to retire?

[00:13:30] **HERMAN:** I decided to retire at 65. I paid off my house. I was going to go out in July of 2002. Then they said, Miniaci [Pacific Maritime Association president, Joseph Miniaci] says one thing and won't come through on something else. He's a liar. So I put it off until finally in December. I made up my mind in October that I was going to retire the first of December.

[00:13:57] **HARVEY:** How come you decided to retire? Some guys stay longer.

[00:14:01] **HERMAN:** Right. I figured I was 65, had my house paid off, enjoy life. I had a damn good job, I really did. I transferred over to the clerks in 1982. That was the first group of guys that transferred from Local 13 over there. I ended up with a computer job. I dispatched for [Local] 63 also for five-and-a-half years. Then I got a computer job; it was supposed to last a year. I did a couple things they liked so I ended up staying the rest of my time till I retired. I was very fortunate.

[00:14:37] **HARVEY:** When did you decide to get involved in the Pacific Coast Pensioners Association?

[00:14:43] **HERMAN:** Al Perisho [former ILWU president, former PCPA officer] got me to come into the Pensioners Association. A guy I admire very well, an honest guy, dutiful friend, and I can't say enough about him. But he got me involved, and then he got me to run for secretary. Miller was the other guy; he was a secretary and then he got sick and passed away. So he [Perisho] asked me to come in and do the job.

[00:15:12] **HARVEY:** When did you run for office?

[00:15:14] **HERMAN:** That started in 2004 so I've been with it just about 10 years.

[00:15:21] **HARVEY:** Are you still secretary?

[00:15:22] **HERMAN:** Still secretary. Recording secretary, yes.

[00:15:30] **HARVEY:** What major issue have I left out? What have we left out that stands out to, that's important?

[00:15:39] **HERMAN:** I think the thing of honesty and helping each other out. Unfortunately, there are times down there that we have guys who are dishonest, checking in on hours, and trying to lie, and so forth. Helping each other out. I've seen it go down the line of not helping each other out. Now it's 'all for me and the heck with you.' To me, the people down there now, all they want is that paycheck.

Well, I'm going to say this thing; I've said it for 40 years. The women have 40 reasons why not to have sex. Down at the waterfront, we have 100 reasons why not to be on the job. To work on and off. We have hurt ourselves up and down the coast on that. My wife said one time, "When are you coming home?"—I'd volunteered—I said, "I'll be home for lunch. I don't know what time I'll be home aside from that."

Everybody tries to help each other out so they can get a nice break or whatever. I wish they'd realize that a lot of people do not like us, particularly the clerical office workers that work inside the office, not the clerks on the docks. They see what's going on. You've got a good job; protect it. Every morning I say thank you Harry [Bridges] for forming our union, making a decent living, a medical plan, and good wages for the working class person.

[00:17:30] **HARVEY:** It's much appreciated. We also usually ask a kind of wrap-up question. What it all meant to you. You sort of covered this to some degree. Do you want to give a wrap up, looking back, what it all meant to you?

[00:17:42] **HERMAN:** Well, it meant a whole lot to me. It meant that I've been able to make a decent living, get a nice automobile, get a nice house, things that I needed that I might not been able to get in my life. It's a wonderful job. The other part—I don't have to travel that far. The most I've traveled was maybe 20 miles when I lived for 18 years in Hermosa [California]. From San Pedro, I was no more than 10 miles away. I don't have to fight the traffic and everything like that. And I was fortunate to have good partners to work with and so forth.

I'll say one thing. In my estimation, one of the most honest guys down there is Tony Salcedo. He's a wonderful person. I enjoyed working with him. We worked together on the conventions we have down there. Just a great guy.

[00:18:42] **HARVEY:** Let me ask a question. Are you Mexican-American in background?

[00:18:51] **HERMAN:** I'm Mexican. My mother came from Santa Rita, New Mexico to have me here in San Pedro. She was with an Indian lady. She [the Indian lady] wanted to adopt me, but her husband said, "No, we're too old." At that time, they were in their mid-forties. 1934. My father came to the door, and one of my cousins was there at the house. Every time she sees me, she says, "You look like your father." My real father was a Catholic priest.

What can I say? I just took the—what do you call it? The swab test? Trying to find out—my mother and father were from Santa Rita or Hurley, New Mexico. I'm getting reports on how long my father lived and so forth. So I'm going in the next year to go back there and see what else I can find out.

[00:20:00] **HARVEY:** That sounds great.

[00:20:02] **HERMAN:** I was born a twin. My twin brother died at birth.

[00:20:05] **HARVEY:** Really?

[00:20:05] **HERMAN:** Yes.

[00:20:09] **HARVEY:** Did the Mexican workers ever have any difficulties with the white workers? Did you ever have any discrimination in the back? The pattern, as you were coming up from 1955?

[00:20:19] **HERMAN:** No, no. Not at all. I never sensed that whatsoever.

The other thing, I tell my father at times, when he went to vote, he'd vote for a Mexican guy. That's the thing that has happened.

Unfortunately, guys who are elected sometimes, it's by popularity. Not by what the person can really do. My thing was always, if both you guys were running for something, I look for 'did you run for executive board? Did you run for membership committee?' If one did and one didn't, my vote went to the people that gave up their time to help out the union.

[00:20:59] **HARVEY:** What did you think when women started coming on the waterfront? What did you think of that?

[00:21:05] **HERMAN:** I didn't like it except for clerks. I often thought that working longshore would not be the right thing.

[00:21:20] **HARVEY:** How come?

[00:21:20] **HERMAN:** The cargo being strenuous and so forth. We found in time that a lot of them went on disability, unfortunately. That's my real thinking. [laughs] What can I say, I don't like the idea of them becoming a cop or a fireman, or stuff like that. It's all for the equal rights. I've always felt a woman's job is a woman's job.

Ok, here's one. A woman can go into a men's locker room in a sporting event, right? Why can't a man go, let them cover up, and interview them in the women's locker? It's a separation.

There are some women that have been able to handle the job. My friend Rudy Rubio had a good partner when he was working that was from San Diego [California], a Hawaiian gal. She could really handle the cargo. But a lot of them, no.

[00:22:30] **HARVEY:** You're good friends with Rudy Rubio?

[00:22:32] **HERMAN:** Yes. When I got married, I was 36 years old. I told his father, who was a frontman in the gang. That was my first gang I went to when I got my book, it was his brother Louie, and I was partners with Rudy, and then his dad was on the front. [Richard Suarez?] was a partner with Louie Rubio. I told them, when I got married, I would get him a fifth of whatever liquor he wanted. When I got married, I took him the bottle. [laughs]

[00:23:08] **HARVEY:** That's nice.

[00:23:13] **HERMAN:** There are some good hard workers, I'm not going to deny it. But a lot of them are just there because, "Hey man, I'm a longshoreman."

[00:23:21] **HARVEY:** Is there anything you want to add at this point? Anything big that we left out?

[00:23:32] **HERMAN:** I'm very happy to be a union member in [Local] 13, in the ILWU, period. My hat's off to the officers that have to put up with all these members and the whole organization at times because they get a lot of flack. But it's one monumental job, to be a head person. I'll always thank that I've been a member. And also to Dave Arian [President of the Harry Bridges Institute, former ILWU President] , who has put in countless hours and years of work to keep Harry Bridges [Institute] going. Thank you, Dave.

[00:24:13] **HARVEY:** Well, thank you. We much appreciate it. Thank you for coming up. Thank you for volunteering for this program.

[00:24:16] **HERMAN:** My pleasure.